



Ecological Virtue: Articulating Tolerance as a Mutual-Respect Between Human Being and Environment

Muhammad Nur Prabowo Setyabudi

Indonesian Institute of Sciences, Jakarta, Indonesia

<mnurpsb@gmail.com>

Abstract

This paper elaborates the meaning of eco-tolerance in the context of ecological community between human and environment. Tolerance is often discussed as theological conception related to the relationship between religion (religious virtue) or socio-political conception related to the relationship between community or identity (political virtue). But how to build a tolerant relationship between human and their environment? What kind of wisdom that we need? I discuss about tolerance as an ecological wisdom or, “ecological virtue”, and a need for human to become a moral subject who has an ecological insight. I will elaborate ethical arguments from the perspective of virtue ethics, one of important disciplines in normative ethics, and environmental ethics, the most important branch in applied ethics, which describe that humans really need to have a mindset of ecocentric oriented, be wise and respectful toward the nature and the environment, build a mutual respect relationship, tolerance is not only a main value in political community, but also a main value in ecological community in a mutual respect ecosystem atmosphere and the existence of mutual recognition between human and nature.

Keywords: tolerance, environmental ethics, ecological virtue, antropocentrism, ecocentrism.

I. Introduction to Environmental Ethics

One thing that is good to become an attention for all of us as academician, that today we welcome “environmental turn”: back to the awareness toward

environment. A trend of appreciation becomes higher for environmental ethics and becomes the part of the most popular disciplines in applied ethics. Environmental ethics is the branch of philosophy and applied ethics which describes the moral relationship

between human and their environment or universe, and discusses about how human should behave toward their environment. At least, awareness toward environment becomes an important part from “academic community”, although to formulate it to be a political policy requires a more serious effort.

One of the models that is developed in the study of environmental ethics is emphasizing on the need to improve the mindset and the character of human subject. Expansionist model approach to ecology, for instance, emphasizes the central role of moral subjects and moral awareness, of how the human develops their ecological awareness, develops their traditional heritage, so that it can protect their next generation, non-animal generation, vegetal generation, and life as a whole.[1] This is the point where the discussion about “tolerance” and “virtue” has more significance. Tolerance as political sense and individual policy towards social community are often discussed, but in the cosmological sense of the ecological community, it has not received a proper portion of the discussion. Tolerance is closely related to individual awareness to abandon ego and be wiser and respectful towards ‘the other’: his sacred environment.

II. Speaking Tolerance in Ecological Context

Tolerance is basically translated as the ability or skill that is owned as

citizen that is based on the awareness to reason, think, and justify to then be able to accept and not to force to refuse something that he disagrees on, although he is able to. Today there is a trend to upgrade to see tolerance as not only as a passive gesture, but is more as active tolerance, and to upgrade the quality of tolerance at a bigger portion which is equal to the challenge that we face.

However, tolerance in a more positive definition is the ability to perform an attitude of “mutual respect”, “mutual affirmation”, and especially “mutual recognition”. In my opinion, this conception is not only needed in the context of sociocultural in the intercultural relationship, or religion in the interreligious relationship, or politic in the interpersonal relationship, but also in the context of ecology within the context of human relationship with nature/environment.

In the context of the relationship between human toward nature, it is obvious that it needs a tolerant relationship between human and their environment. In certain definition, tolerance is a tool to achieve the peace and harmony. Whereas, human does not only need to be peaceful with each other, but also with their environment. That human should make the nature as their life partner, others also need equal recognition, as the moral subject that deserves an appreciation. Thus, tolerance is not only applied in the

social or political context, but also in the ecological context.

III. Problem Identification: Environmental Crisis

I once read the book which describes about the environmental crisis and the earth future which we live in and it now has been inappropriate place to live, entitled *Uninhabitable Earth* (2019). There are too many environmental crisis elements that should be mentioned here. On the first chapter, Davie Wallace-Wells explains the chaotic condition and environmental crisis that occur today so it is described dramatically that earth is not a proper and comfortable place and it does not give any future anymore for human.[2]

One thing that becomes the main moral message that human has been that totalitarian, dominative and repressive toward nature. Those repressive and intolerant behaviors are not only done by human to other human, but also toward their own ecosystem. There are many misunderstandings which are conducted by humans in treating the nature not only as conquered “others”, but also as “economic object” which is exploited. Ecological crisis has been the proof of repression consequence and that ecological violence is a deep conflict between human and their environment, and perhaps is also with God as their creator because He created this beautiful nature at first but it turns to be “unhabitable earth” on the human

hands.

Many sharp criticisms have been addressed toward the anthropocentric moral view which cannot be accepted in moral perspective. Today we need a new alternative perspective of ethics which is holistic and ecological oriented, which really emphasizes on moral relationship to human and to justify the moral truth with a human measurement only, by ignoring the ecological measurement.

If anthropocentrism is continued, what will happen is repressive and dominative behaviors, and it will cause a bad consequence not only for environment, but also for human himself. The main criticism upon the nature damage is that up until nowadays human builds a closed and disrespectful relationship toward their environment, and builds an egocentric relationship. In other words, human is not tolerant enough toward their nature, even more, they create repressive and dominative, ignores their ecological responsibility, and does not build an ecosystem balance.

IV. New Holistic Ethics: What We Get from Virtue Ethics

Facing the environmental crisis, the observers do not only discuss about the important meaning of ecological oriented policy, but also the need of ethics to change the human mindset toward their environment. Tolerance as ethical value also should be interpreted

not only as the religious-centric value, but should also have an eco-centric value. There are too many ecological intolerance that we see and we cannot ignore it. We need a democratic relationship not only with human, but also with our environment, where right and responsibility protecting relationship among members are preserved well.

Virtue ethics is always understood as an ethic which emphasizes on “self” or character construction. But, what kind of character that we need now to support the eco-centric insight? In my opinion, the character that we need is a tolerant character in a more holistic understanding.

I prefer to use the perspective of virtue ethics to explain the ecological virtues and wisdom. Ethical virtue bases its theoretical framework on the role of the “self” and the individual and his character both internal and external, being good person and good community. This paper summarizes three ethical topics that are intertwined with one another.[3]

In the context of facing the environmental damage, many people agree that there is a need of a new ethical approach which is more holistic than dominative ethics only. Virtue ethics delivers a contribution to emphasize the moral improvement on “moral character” aspect and invites us to return to all human being to become a wise man to reconsider about the

important meaning of “nobleness” and builds not only a tolerant political community, but also a harmonious ecological community.

Appreciating and loving the nature and the environment where we live in are a noble attitude. In other side, we should criticize the society personality who is still trapped on “dishonesty” and a downgraded morality. The behaviors like “indifference”, apathetic, feeling unguilty, which generates a negative excess for environment, is the part of downgraded morality which cannot be accepted in moral perspective

V. Tolerance and an Ecological Virtue

It is true that we need a new vision about environmental ethics which is more holistic which has an appreciative value toward nature and environment, but in other side we need to show a pure zero-tolerant attitude toward ecological crime because it makes the earth more destructive. The sources of thought for us to be wiser in treating the nature comes from many actors.

Besides commitment toward environmental ethic principles such as sustainability and responsibility, we should remember again about the need to build the “ecological virtues”. Tolerance as the ecological wisdom is understood as the ability of self-control to not act destructive and exploitative toward environment.

Tolerance toward the nature

is needed in order for human not to indulge their lust by exploiting the environment just for fulfilling their human material need and for their economic need only. Massive industrialism practices as real expression from human exploitation toward nature has been proven to give the biggest contribution for the damage of biological balance.

Tolerance in the ecological wisdom understanding means letting the nature grows appropriately without disturbing the ecosystem, without repressing and limiting the wiggle room so that it minimizes the nature damage, and uses the facility of nature appropriately and responsibly.

Ecological tolerance refuses ecological apathy, as the form of 'indifference'. Between human as agent should act of co-existence, mutual respect and mutual recognition, mutual-respect, not only toward humans themselves, but also toward environment which along with the growth of nature eco-centric wisdom is also understood as moral subject. [4] In addition to that, it is also necessary to defend the anti-violence principles toward nature.

Eco-centrism tries to address the ethical dilemmas related to environmental problem, and teaches us that the most fundamental moral relationship is not only a responsibility between humans, but also nature and environment, in their conscience, it

also has equal moral status, in a natural ecosystem entity.[5] Respecting the nature is the fundamental part of ethics principles of living environment.[6] he in himself is valuable, and ethically should be respected. This perspective surely negates the egocentrism and anthropocentrism, an ecological perspective which only emphasizes on one actor only, it is the side of human itself.

The Islamic ecological perspective also delivers the conception about "muamala", a good relation. And one of the most important relationship is "muamalah ma'al alam", the need of having a good relationship with nature besides with the God and human. Human and their environment has a moral tie in the form of a noble responsibility and cannot be deducted by economical interest. Human performs the mandate to be the caliphate in this earth, fundamental relationship between the individual and nature and explains the eco-communal conception of the ummah which contains, in addition to theological, ecological responsibility in it.

Besides the muamala aspect, as stated by Hasyim Kamali, respecting the nature and preserving the environment are the part of manifestation of "tauhid" principles, which teaches that human along with other creatures, the universe, are the organic and integrated unity.[7]

The ecological agenda remains a non-mainstream discourse within

the Islamic thought which is still legal-minded and is still less in giving a bigger attention on the needs of environmental ethics. However, the Islamic thought which is environmental oriented through the environmental Fiqh study (fiqh al-bi'ah), is the progressive breakthrough of Muslim community in Indonesia which needs to be supported and developed seriously in academic world.[8]

Ethically, Islam teaches not only “muamalah ma'allah”, a harmonious relationship with God, and “muamalah ma'an nas” or keeping a good relationship with human, but also reaching the ecological dimension with the teaching of “muamalah ma'al alam” which is keeping a good relationship with environment and universe.

The ecological wisdom has a strong foundation in Islam. It is not only a norm of al-Qur'an [ex: Q.S. Al-Rum:41; Al-A'raf:56], but also becomes the part of prophetic tradition of prophet Muhammad which is practiced in the Hima concept (protected areas), *Al-Harim* (prohibited areas), and *Ihya al-Mawat* (activate barren lands).[9]

Off course we also should remember the teaching of *Tri Hita Karana* in Hinduism tradition, which teaches the three most important basic principles, which are *parhayangan* or preserving the spiritual environment, *pawongan* or preserving the social harmoniousness, but what is also equally important is *palemahan*

or the need to sustain the natural-environment. These developments in Bali in its commitment should preserve and improve the environment quality, preservation, development of ecosystem, architecture, and etc.[10]

Meanwhile in Javanese tradition, tolerance in the spirit of ecology is expressed through the Javanese philosophical principles of *hamemayu hayuning bawana*, a noble mission of self-protection and preserves the harmoniousness and sustainability of universe. Human in their life has a moral responsibility to preserve the harmoniousness not only with other human, but also with universe.

All of them are the ethical capital in developing the environmental ethics. In other side, the movements which rise the support of eco-literation should be forwarded.

VI. Conclusion

The eco-literation vision is needed to understand the tolerance contextually, in the spirit to change the subject mindset to be tolerant which is not only to human, or in Islam is called as “muamalah maan naas”, but also the need of a good relationship with environment or “muamalah maal alam”, and to introduce ecological wisdoms or “ecological virtues”.

The writing above tries to meet the religious vision and ethical vision on the same target, the importance of human to build the harmonious and peaceful

relationship with their environment. In the case of environmental management and the importance of sustaining the ecosystem, religious ethic and secular ethic equally find their common ground. This idea actually is not bombastic, but it is important in our context in facing the environmental crisis and improving the human relationship with

their environment and their nature and it is so needed. The common vision and perspective on ecocentrism and ecological virtues needs to be maintained.[]

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